114 However, all the works mentioned in the preceding paragraphs contain various linguistic data—generally limited to mediocre vocabularies—and a description of material culture, carefully undertaken in Rondonia. Nowhere do they treat of family life and social organization. Under these circumstances it may be surprising that the Nambikwara seem to have been completely forgotten after the publication of the work of Roquette Pinto. It was natural that our own expedition, begun exactly
● 121 26 years and two months after /3/ the beginning of Roquette Pinto's trip, should be dedicated to filling in—even partially—the gaps of preceding research. We have sought more extensive and precise linguistic information; paid more attention to the "dynamic" aspect of the material culture, considering less the finished products than the processes of their fabrication; and above all, we have dedicated ourselves mainly to the study of family and social organization, the description of which is the object of the present work.

114 It is superfluous to stress that an exhaustive study of the life and society of the Nambikwara will not be found here. We were only able to share the life of the Indians during the nomadic period, and that alone would be enough to limit the extent of our research. A trip undertaken during the sedentary period would no doubt furnish some important information, and would permit correcting the general perspective. We hope to be able to undertake this some day. As Roquette Pinto wrote at the beginning of Rondonia: "Lentas hão de ser sempre as construcções cientificas en tal terreno". ["Scientific building in such country must always be slow."] (1) His book, however, must always

1. Prefacio da Segunda Edição, p. 13.

be merited with having called attention to one of the most interesting cultures of indigenous Brazil and having been the first to produce a lively and charming picture of it.

131 The territory occupied by the Nambikwara Indians extends from the
133 Papagaio River in the east to a zone in the northwest ending approximately at the junction of the Commemoração de Floriano and Barão de Melgaço Rivers, both branches of the Machado River or Gi-Parana. This point marks, at the same time, the end of the plateau which occupies nearly the entire central and western parts of the state of Mato Grosso. The southern boundary is placed at the middle course of the Guaporé River, and, farther to the west, it follows the entire course of the Commemoração de Floriano River. The location of the northern

101 Tamaindé, then installed at Tres Buritis. This vocabulary certainly
114 comes from group b2 of our classification, who are distinguished by
197 the usage of a verbal suffix of the form -ĵore, and which we have also found in the region of Tres Buritis. However, in 1938, the users of this same dialect called themselves by the name Taiaté, and the name Tamaindé was only used by a group speaking a different dialect (b1) to point out a third group (c of our classification), and one may doubt that its dialect even belongs to the Nambikwara linguistic family.

121 What conclusions may be drawn? Any attempt at classification based on the names of bands, whether they be chosen by the band or received from neighboring groups is condemned to failure in advance. The only sound basis for a classification of bands and groups can be linguistic. In any case, this method will be the only valid one as long as study carried on during the rainy season will not permit the establishment of larger and more stable units than the nomadic bands of the dry season. As it would be difficult and arbitrary to call each [28] dialect by the temporary name of such and such a band who spoke it at the moment when the research was being carried on, and as a classification undertaken on the basis of present knowledge could only be provisional, we shall proceed with the aid of symbols, in preference to the names of groups which would give a false picture of reality.

197 This having been stated, it can be said that the Nambikwara linguistic family includes three principal groups of which two are subdivided into sub-groups. There are in all five distinct units. The two groups that we designate respectively by a and b are closely related from a semantic and morphological point of view, and they incontestably represent two modulations of the same language. In the two cases one observes the same usage of classifactory suffixes, with a verbal suffix whose meaning is "to be," "to become," "to do," to make." In the dialect of group a, this verbal suffix appears in the forms -kedjutu, -kedutsu -ki'titu. One should distinguish a type a1, predominant from the Papagaio to the Juina River, with an ending -u for nouns, and a type a2 which tends to substitute an ending -e for the preceding. As this last group is found to the west of the other, and it occupies approximately the region from the sources of the Doze de Otubro River and the Camararé River, it appears likely that the ending -e has appeared under the influence of dialect b. Apart from the ending and several variations in vocabulary, the dialects a1 and a2 are practically identical.

The vocabularies of groups a and b diverge more seriously. The latter also presents an ending -e for nouns, and some [9] new forms for the verbal suffix. On that latter basis, one should distinguish a

121 In other publications (2) we have brought up the question of
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> 2. On dual organization in South America, América Indígena, Mexico, 1944. On certain structural similarities of the Chibcha and Nambikwara languages. Congrès International des Américanistes, Paris, 1947.

knowing if the type of life of the Nambikwara, apparently very primitive, does or does not constitute the authentic vestige of ancient conditions. Considered in the present, their level of culture is certainly very low. They live naked, especially the women, who only wear a thin string of buriti beads around the waist, some earrings, necklaces worn around the neck or looped over the shoulder, [14] bracelets made from the tail of the large armadillo, and, sometimes, some narrow bands of cotton woven by their husbands, or some buriti straw, tightly bound around the biceps, and wooden pins. Besides the same ornaments, the men sometimes put on a sort of straw pompom, fastened to the waist above the sex organs, and smaller ones, attached to cotton bracelets; on the other hand, they do not wear shell bracelets. The complete ignorance of the hammock and the Nambikwara
[513] custom of sleeping on the ground (or, more rarely, on long strips of the bark of the palm tree paxiuba) has intrigued ethnologists for a long time. This sentiment is shared by neighboring tribes, and the
[101] Paresi, mentioning this peculiarity, call the Nambikwara Uaikoakoré, "those who sleep on the ground."

221 The Nambikwara year must be divided into two distinct periods. During the rainy season (from October to March), each group settles on some small elevation rising above the course of some stream. The Indians then construct crude huts with curious variations in form and materials. They burn clearings in the approaches to the forests which
221 occupy the humid valley floor, and there they plant and cultivate
241 gardens principally with the starch-yielding plants of the manihot genus (sweet and bitter) and tobacco, sometimes some peas, cotton, peanuts, and calabash (Lagenaria sp.). They grate the yucca (manioc) on planks covered with the sharp bark of the palm tree, they press it with the aid of a piece of twisted bark. The garden produce furnishes food resources sufficient for part of the sedentary period, and even of use later: the Nambikwara preserve the yucca by burying the residue of the grated pulp in the ground.

221 At the arrival of the dry season, they abandon the village, or rather the site of temporary residence, and each group "breaks up," if one can say that, into several nomadic bands. For about seven

789 Poison is thus nãnde par excellence, although the latter can exist in other forms, at the same time less precise and more complex. We attach extreme importance to the fact that a rigorously utilitarian technique of the manufacture of poisons is found associated with a theory which accounts for their effectiveness through the intermediary of metaphysical concepts. The presence among the Nambikwara of a curare reduced to a basic product, and whose preparation excludes all ritual, associated with the very low cultural level of these Indians, poses in a particularly impressive way the question of finding out if these characteristics which are very primitive are so by origin or constitute the residue of an impoverished culture. Now, it is much more reasonable to interpret the apparent contradiction of theory and practice in matters of poison by the loss of complex rituals which farther north are attached to the making of curare, than it would be to explain how a theory of supernatural character could have been built on the bases of treatment which has remained purely experimental, of the root of the strychnos.

Besides the notion of nãnde we should examine another which is the object of a particularly advanced elaboration among the eastern groups, that of the atʉsu (a1). Atʉsu signifies animal, but the use of the term by the Indians is complex. First of all it is the animal taken in a generic sense, in opposition to the inanimate. They present me with a honey cake and, pointing out the body of a bee which is still in it, I ask what it is. They do not answer, "it is a bee" but: atʉsu, "it is the animal." Atʉsu also means real animals, but ones without their own names in the vocabulary, and which are of particularly fearful character. Thus oxen are called by this name by the Nambikwara who never saw any [99] before the years 1910-1915, and who entertain a great fear of them. Then we find the same term to designate the stars (eastern groups), and the same name is given to the ticktock of the clock, both conceived of as realities animated by mysterious characteristics. Finally, atʉsu is a special animal of supernatural essence, which is seen appearing in two cases—at night, on the road, in certain places and during certain periods, and upon the approach of death. In the first case, one risks being attacked and killed by the atʉsu if one does not defend oneself in the appropriate manner. This means is found in the throwing stick [ẽpieu] (distinct from the digging stick), thrown in a prescribed manner. The throwing stick, a large piece of wood of flattened form and pointed at the end is furnished with a handle usually decorated with black and white bark weaving (javelin: hĩdosu [a1], kẽʉ̃ere

(Antonio Pires de Campos, "Breve noticia, etc.," Revista do Instituto Historico e Geographico Brasileiro, Vol. 25, 1862, p. 445). Cf. also C. Lévi-Strauss, "The name of the Nambikuara," American Anthropologist, Vol. 47, 1945. 101

is the problem of a syncretistic culture which one finds so frequently in South American ethnology. 157 182

When taken from the geographical point of view, the statement of the problem is easily reconstituted. One may ask one how best to interpret the presence of a nucleus of low cultures placed symmetrically, as regards the tributaries of the right bank of the Amazon, to that which occupied, and still occupies, eastern Brazil. Under the two wings of the "T" which sketches the distribution of far more evolved cultures of the Amazon valley, and the Madeira, with the long vertical zone which extends from the Xingu to the Tocantins, the low level Gé to the east, and the Nambikwara to the west, produce an equilibrium, like isolated islands. In the case of the Nambikwara, a supplementary problem is raised, that of the duality of their culture and their type of life. The latter can be explained either by taking as a basis the most elementary form of adaptation, and by assuming the borrowing of agricultural life from groups of a more evolved culture, or by leaving the higher form as an impoverishment determined by cultural isolation, or by the [130] suppression in particularly inhospitable regions which would have imposed secondary forms of adaptation. However, it is only by an appeal to all the available sources of information which should include, besides sociological studies, the study of the language and the material culture, and by comparison with the groups living in the same geographic atmosphere, that an attempt to interpret these problems can reasonably be undertaken. 121

3: Lévi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
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which are to be found, always and everywhere, as prerequisites for the existence of human society.

The simpler organisms may provide a better field for the study of organic functions than those which exhibit the same functions, although under a more complex form. Simple human groups render the anthropologist the same kind of service without any need of surmising that they represent survivals of older types of organization. Now, to call upon the notion of function in the field of anthropological sciences is no discovery. This notion, first introduced by Durkheim in 1894,[1] has been only too much exploited since then, sometimes in the most abusive way. There are indeed functions of the social life as well as functions of the organic life. But neither in one domain nor in the other does everything correspond to, nor may it be justified by, its functional value. To state the opposite view could lead to only two results: either an anthropological come-back to eighteenth century Providentialism, where culture would play in relation to man the same utopian tutelary part which was attributed to nature by the author of *Paul et Virginie*,[2] or the reducing of the notion of function to a mere tautology—to say, for instance, that the function of the notched lapel on our coats is to gratify our esthetic feeling would be meaningless, since, here, obviously, the feeling results from the custom, and not the contrary. The custom has a history which explains its existence. It doesn't, under present circumstances, possess any function.

The preceding may appear to be a very ponderous introduction to an address dedicated by its title to the psychological aspects of chieftainship in a small Brazilian tribe. But I do not believe that the data which I am going to present, if considered only as data on chieftainship among a hitherto little known group, would honestly deserve one hour of attention. Similar facts have been recorded many times, either joined or separately. The particular interest offered by the Nambikuara is that they confront us with one of the simplest conceivable forms of social and political organization. Chiefs and chieftainship exist, among all human groups, under very different forms, but it would be vain to assign a special functional value to each of the modali-

[1] In "Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique": "The function is the correspondence between the considered fact and the general needs of the social organism." p. 117.

[2] In his "Etudes de la Nature" (1784) Bernardin de Saint Pierre suggested that Nature devised melon ribs to make the fruit easier to divide on the family table, and that it made fleas black so that they could more easily be caught on white skin.

3: Lévi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
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ties down to their smallest details. There is, undoubtedly, a function in chieftainship. This can, however, be reached only through analysis as the underlying principle of the institution. In other words, the differing structure of the digestive organs in man, ox, fish and clam do not point toward different functions of the digestive system. The function is always and everywhere the same, and can be better studied, and more fully understood where it exists under a simple form—for instance, in a mollusc. Similarly, and as Professor Lowie once wrote, if anthropology is to be considered as a scientific study, its subject matter cannot be individual cultures, but culture taken as a whole; the rôle of individual cultures being to offer, according to their own characteristics, special angles from which the basic functions of culture, although universal in application, can be more easily reached.

This will perhaps help us to eliminate preliminary questions which otherwise could have proved very difficult. Anthropologists in South America and elsewhere have been eagerly debating the question of whether these South American tribes—nomadic, relying mostly on collecting and gathering, with little or no agriculture, little or no pottery, and, in some cases, with no dwelling other than crude shelters—should be considered as truly primitive and as having preserved their exceptionally low cultural level through tarriance, or whether they did not previously possess a higher type of social and material organisation and have regressed to a pseudo-archaism under unfavorable circumstances. The Nambikuara are one of those tribes which, along with the Siriono, on the other side of the Guaporé valley, the Cayapo, Bororo, Karaja of central Brasil, the so-called *Gé* of Central and Eastern Brasil, and some others, together form a kernel of primitiveness surrounded, in the West, by the higher tribes of the upper Amazon, the Bolivian plain and the Chaco, and from the Orenoco's to the La Plata's estuaries, by a coastal strip inhabited mostly by the Arawak, Carib and Tupí-Guarani linguistic families. An independent linguistic stock divided into several dialects, the Nambikuara seem to display one of the more backward cultures in South America. At least, some of their bands do not build huts and are wholly ignorant of pottery and, even among the others, these two arts are exceedingly poor. There is no weaving, except for the narrow arm and leg bands which are made of cotton; no dress whatsoever, either for the men or for the women; no sleeping contrivances, such as hammocks or platforms; the natives being used to sleeping on the bare ground without the protection of blankets, mats or hides.

3: Lévi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
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621 people are seldom met together, the average size of the bands being twenty individuals, women and children included. This demographic collapse cannot possibly have taken place without affecting the structure of the band. But here, too, we do not need to concern ourselves 121 with such questions as the type of political organization in earlier times. It is probably more difficult to understand Nambikuara sociology now than it was thirty years ago. Perhaps, on the contrary, the much reduced Nambikuara band offers, better than in the past, a privileged field for a study in social anthropology. My contention is that, precisely on account of its extreme impoverishment, Nambikuara political structure lays bare some basic functions which may remain hidden in more complex and elaborate systems of government.

[36] Each year, at the end of the rainy season, that is, in April or in early May, the semi-permanent dwellings laid in the vicinity of the 621 gallery-forest where the gardens are cleared and tilled, are abandoned and the population splits into several bands formed on a free choice basis. Each band includes from two to about ten families usually tied by kinship. This may be misleading when a band is met, for one easily gets the impression that it is formed as an extensive family. It 601 does not take long to discover, however, that the kinship tie between [602] two families belonging to separate bands may be as close, and eventually closer, than between two families inside the same band. The [582] Nambikuara have a simple kinship system based on cross-cousin marriage and the subsequent dichotomy between "cross" and "parallel" in every generation. Therefore, all the men in one generation are either "brothers" or "brothers-in-law," and men and women are to one another either siblings (true or classificatory) or spouses (true or classificatory). Similarly, children are, in relation to the adults, either sons and daughters (true or classificatory) or nephews and nieces, which is the same as actual or potential children-in-law.[1] As a result, there is no great choice of terms to express kinship, and this explains why kinship inside the band may appear closer than it actually is, and kinship between people belonging to different bands more remote than shown 602 by genealogies. Furthermore, a bilateral cross-cousin marriage system functioning in a relatively small tribe must produce a progressive 621 narrowing, and even a multiplication, of the kinship ties between any two individuals. This is a supplementary reason preventing family

[1] C. Lévi-Strauss. "The Social Use of Kinship Terms among Brazilian Indians." American Anthropologist, 45 (3) 1943.

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622 515 182 liabilities of their sex, are his helpers, comforters and assistants. They are, at the same time, leadership's prize and instrument. Can it be said, from the native point of view, that the prize is worth the trouble? To answer that question, I shall now have to consider the problem from a broader angle, namely, what does this elementary social structure, the Nambikuara band, teach us about leadership, its basis and its function?

● 121 There is a first point which does not require great elaboration. Nambikuara data contribute, with many others, to destroy the belief originated by early anthropologists, and temporarily revived by psychoanalysis, that the primitive chief could find his prototype in a symbolical father, and that the simpler forms of the State could progressively have grown out of the family. We have found at the root of the crudest forms of chieftainship a decisive step, which introduced something entirely new in respect to biological relations—and this step consists of *consent*. Consent, we have seen, is at the same time the origin and the limit of leadership. Unilateral relations such as right of age, autocratic power, or others, may appear in groups having an already complex structure. In simple forms of social organization, such as the one I have tried to describe, they are inconceivable. Here, on the contrary, the relationship between the chief and the group can be seen as a perpetual process of arbitration where the chief's talents and authority on the one hand and the group's size, cohesion and willingness, on the other, constantly react on and influence each other. If I had the time, and if it were not so far removed from my topic, I would have liked to show what considerable support modern anthropological observations bring, in this respect, to the analysis of the eighteenth century social philosophers. I am well aware of the fact that Rousseau's "social contract," which is the step by which individuals resign their autonomy in favor of the General Will, is entirely different from the nearly contractual relations existing between the chief and his followers. It remains true, however, that Rousseau and his contemporaries displayed a keen sociological feeling when they understood that cultural attitudes and elements such as "contract" and "consent" are not the result of secondary processes, as claimed by their opponents; they are culture's raw materials, and it is impossible to conceive a political or social organization in which they would not already be present. If I understand correctly, the recent analysis, by modern American

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anthropologists, of the state-growth significance of military societies among the Plains Indians leads to exactly the same conclusion.[6]

My second point is but an exemplification of the first: consent is the psychological basis of leadership, but in daily life it expresses itself in, and is measured by, a game of give-and-take played by the chief and his followers, and which brings forth, as a basic attribute of leadership, the notion of reciprocity. The chief has power, but he must be generous. He has duties, but he is entitled to several wives. Between him and the group, there is a perpetual balance of prestations, privileges, services and obligations. The notion of reciprocity, originated by Marcel Mauss, was brilliantly analysed by Malinowski in his "Crime and Custom in Savage Society." In respect to leadership, he says: "The claims of chief over commoners, husband over wife, parent over child and vice versa are not exercised arbitrarily and one-sidedly, but according to definite rules, and arranged into well-balanced chains of reciprocal services."[7] This statement needs somewhat to be completed. Malinowski is right when he points out that the chief-commoners' relationship, as every relationship in primitive society, is based on reciprocity. In the first case, however, the reciprocity is not of the same type as in the others. In any human society, whether primitive or civilised, two different cycles of reciprocity are constantly at work: first, the chain of individual prestations linking the isolated members of the group; and, next, a relation of reciprocity binding the group considered as group (not as a collection of individuals) and its ruler. In the case we have studied, this is well illustrated by the rules of marriage. Taken in its broadest sense, the incest prohibition means that everybody in the group is obliged to deliver his sister or daughter to an individual; and, conversely, is entitled to receive his wife from the latter (whether from the same man, as in exchange-marriage, or from a different one). Thus, a continuous chain of reciprocal prestations is directly or indirectly set up between all the collective or individual members of the group.[8] This may be called qualitative reciprocity; but incest prohibition also provides the basis for a quantita-

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[6] R. H. Lowie. 1927. The Origin of the State: 78-107; New York. K. N. Llewellyn & E. A. Hoebel. 1941. The Cheyenne Way. Part II, ch. 5. University of Oklahoma Press.

[7] B. Malinowski. 1940. Crime and Custom in Savage Society: 48. New York. (Third Printing).

[8] See the late F. E. Williams' remarkable analysis in "Papuans of the Trans-Fly": 167-182. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1936.

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121 tive reciprocity. We may consider it as a "freezing" measure, which, while it forbids the appropriation of women who are at one's natural disposal, prepares the formulation of marriage rules allowing every man to get a wife. Therefore, a close relationship exists in a given society between the forbidden degrees and the extent to which polygamy is allowed. How does the preceding apply to the Nambikuara? If they had cross-cousin marriage associated exclusively with monogamy, there would be a perfectly simple system of reciprocity (from the individual's point of view) both qualitative and quantitative. This theoretical formula is, however, upset by the chief's privilege to polygamy. The withholding of the simpler rule, in favor of the chief, creates for each individual an element of insecurity which would otherwise not exist. Let us state this in other terms: the granting of polygamous privilege to the chief means that the group has exchanged *individual elements of security* resulting from the monogamous rule for *collective security* provided by leadership. Each man receives a wife from another man, but the chief receives several wives from the group. In exchange, he offers to guarantee against need and danger, not to the individuals whose sisters or daughters he marries; not to those who will be deprived of a spouse by his polygamous right; but to the group, taken as a whole. For it is the group, taken as a whole, which has withheld the common law in his favor. The preceding considerations may have some bearing upon the theory of plural marriage; but, most of all, they remind us that the interpretation of the State, conceived as a security system, recently revived by discussions about a national insurance policy (such as the Beveridge plan and others), is not a modern development. It is a return to the basic nature of social and political organization.

So much for the group's point of view on leadership. What about the chief's own attitude in relation to his function? What is his incentive in assuming duties of which I have given a not too favorable account? We saw that the Nambikuara band leader has a tiresome and exacting role; that he must exert himself without pause to maintain his position. What is more, if he does not constantly improve it, he runs the risk of losing what he has taken months or years to achieve. This explains why many men, as I have already said, shun leadership. But why do others accept and even seek it? It is always difficult to appraise psychological motives; and the task is almost impossible when a culture totally alien to our own is considered. I venture to say,

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however, that the polygamous privilege, highly valued as it may be from the point of view of sexual gratification, sentimental appeal and social prestige, would not suffice to determine a leader's vocation. Plural marriage is but a technical prerequisite of chieftainship; its individual value can only be residual. There must be something more; and, going over the moral and psychological features of the Nambikuara chiefs I knew, and trying to hold on to those fugitive and irreplaceable glimpses at their intimate selves (of which no scientific approach may certify the accuracy, but which gain, from a deep feeling of friendship and human communication, some sort of intuitive value), I feel imperiously led to this answer: there are chiefs because there are, in any human group, men who, unlike most of their companions, enjoy prestige for its own sake, feel a strong appeal to responsibility, and to whom the burden of public affairs brings its own reward. These individual differences are certainly emphasised and "played up" by the different cultures, and to unequal degrees. But their clear-cut existence in a society as little competitive as the Nambikuara strongly suggests to my mind that their origin itself is not cultural. They are rather part of those psychological raw materials out of which any given culture is made. Men are not all alike; and, in primitive societies, believed by early anthropologists to be overwhelmed by the crushing power of custom, these individual differences are as keenly perceived and worked out as in our so-called "individualistic" civilization. |2|

It is remarkable how far the practical experience of colonial administrators has outgrown, in relation to the previous considerations, anthropologists' theoretical studies. During the past twenty years, Lowie's pessimistic appraisal of anthropological work in the field of political institutions[9] has certainly not lost its value. We have much to learn from the scientifically untrained who deal with native institutions. I shall not here record Lyautey's testimony without reservation: "In every society, there is a leading class born for leadership and without which nothing can be accomplished."[10] What may be true for the simpler structures cannot be considered equally valid when considering the complex ones, where the function of leadership does not manifest itself any more in a "pure" state. But let us listen to Eboué who passed away a few months ago. Himself a full-blooded negro, he

[9] At the beginning of Chapter XIII of "Primitive Society."

[10] Quoted in: Governor-General Felix Eboué's Memorandum on "Native Policy," issued on November 8,1942.

3: Lévi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
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[12] wrote the following when he was Governor-General of French Equatorial Africa in special relation to those nomadic tribes which, as he put it, "live under a regime of organized anarchy." I quote: "Who is to be chief? I shall not answer, as was the custom in Athens, 'the best.' There is no best chief, there is just a chief;" and further; "the chief is not interchangeable . . . the chief pre-exists."[11] This is precisely what was suggested to us from the start of our analysis of Nambikuara society.

In conclusion, I submit that, when developing the study of political institutions, anthropologists will have to pay more and more attention to the idea of "natural leadership." I am well aware that this expression is almost contradictory. There is no possible form of leadership which does not receive its shape and specification inside of a given cultural context. But this expression can be taken as a borderline case, or as a limit—as say the mathematicians. While the limit can never be reached, simple social structures give us, in the order of their simplicity, an even closer approximation of it. In such studies, we may accordingly foresee a privileged field for close cooperative work between anthropology and individual psychology.

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[11] *Ibid.*

6: Levi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1943
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THE SOCIAL USE OF KINSHIP TERMS AMONG BRAZILIAN INDIANS

By CLAUDE LEVI STRAUSS

121 607 THE kinship system of the Nambikuara Indians of the Western Matto Grosso is one of the most simple in Brazil. At the same time it is typical of a sociological pattern, cross cousin marriage, which according to our present information seems to have been very common throughout South America. The object of this article is to compare the familial organization of the Nambikuara with that of other tribes described in the older literature and to show that a certain kinship tie, the brother-in-law relationship, once possessed a meaning among many South American tribes far transcending a simple expression of relationship. This significance, still observable in Nambikuara culture, is both sexual and politico-social; and, owing to its complexity, the brother-in-law relationship may perhaps be regarded as an actual institution. Since the sixteenth century travellers and sociologists have failed to devote sufficient attention to the phenomenon, probably because it could readily be interpreted as a development of the imported Iberian *compadre* relationship. In our opinion, on the contrary, the brother-in-law relationship, together with its remarkable implications, constitutes an indigenous aboriginal institution based on the pattern of native culture. Nevertheless, it presents a striking example of convergence in which the native and Latin-Mediterranean institutions show numerous apparent similarities overlying important structural differences.

131 133 The Nambikuara Indians are settled on the upper courses of the feeders of the Tapajoz River, between the eleventh and the fifteenth parallels. Their territory consists of a semi-desert savanna, which contrasts with the narrow gallery forests along the main waterways. The fertile soil of these forests allows [511] the natives to cultivate a few gardens in the rainy season, but during most of the year the Nambikuara subsist mainly by hunting and gathering wild food. 177 Compared to the majority of Brazilian tribes, their cultural level is low. As they were discovered only in 1907 and as they had practically no contact with white civilization between the year of the Rondon-Roosevelt Expedition in 1914 and the time of our own field work in 1938–39, their familial and social organization may be considered still intact.

601 The Nambikuara kinship system may be summarized as follows: All the father's brothers are classified together with the father and are called "father," and all the mother's sisters are classified with the mother and are called "mother." The father's sisters and the mother's brothers are classified together with the spouse's parents and the parents' parents in a single category which denotes simultaneously the cross aunts and cross uncles, the mother-in-law and father-in-law, and the grandparents. Passing to Ego's generation, the parallel cousins, both the children of the father's brothers and of the mother's sisters, are merged with siblings and are called "brother" and "sister," Turn-

7: Roquette-Pinto--15 E-4,5 (no date) 1938 SP17 Nambicuara SP17 (ca. 1912)

141 144 According to Ehrenreich's tables, in terms of stature the Indians of the Serra do Norte occupy a position intermediary between the Paressi and Nahuqua, and come close to the Bacairi, Mehinacu, Trumai and Yamamadi.

[212] The percentage of elevated statures (19 percent) places the Nambicuara near the Cayapo (20 percent) and far from the Bacairi (0 percent), Nahuqua (6.6 percent), Trumai (0 percent) and Paressi (11 percent).

The difference in height between the sexes (0.12 meters) places them far from the Tupian Indians, among whom the man is often shorter than the woman, and from the Arawakan groups, where men and women are of the same height (Barbosa Rodrigues).

In the circumference of the chest, equal to one half their total height, they approach the normal types of the white race (De Giovanni). The index between total height and chest circumference is 50.

This is not the rule among Brazilian Indians, whose chest circumference is usually more than one half their total height. In Ehrenreich's tables, the Indians closest to the Nambicuara in this respect are the Caraja of the Araguaia River, whose index is 53.3.

141 121 144 The Manouvrier [Skelic] Index expresses the ratio between the length of the upper part of the body and that of the lower limbs, which together add up to the total stature. Morphologically and physiologically, the upper part of the body (head and trunk) is much more important than the lower limbs. To determine its relation to the total height, therefore, is to disclose to some extent the biological worth of the individual (Montessori).

Manouvrier distinguished three basic types in terms of this index, which he named macroskelic, mesatiskelic and brachyskelic. In the middle type (mesatiskelic) the upper part of the body adds to slightly more than half the total height (index 52); in the macroskelic type, the index varies from 52 to 50; in the brachyskelic type, from 53 to 55.

[213] . . . This ratio applies to adults, for the proportions of the body undergo basic modifications in the course of growth . . . . The [three types] occur among all races and all peoples; however, research has shown that there is a certain prevalence of brachyskelic types among the yellow races, of macroskelic types among the black races, and of mesatiskelic types among the whites.